

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 LIMA 01610 221902Z

ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY LIMA

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CONFIDENTIAL LIMA 1610

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PE

SUBJECT: SITUATION OF HUNGER STRIKERS

REF: (A) LIMA 0938, (B) LIMA 1312, (C) LIMA 1355

1. EMBOFF MET WITH DR. LAURA CALLER IBERICO, LABOR LAWYER AND FORMER AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE, "ON LEAVE" FROM THAT RESPONSIBILITY BECAUSE OF ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN CAMPAIGN FOR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ON BEHALF OF WORKER, PEASANT, STUDENT POPULAR COALITION (FOCEP), BUT STILL ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS. ACCORDING TO DR. CALLER, SOME 100 HUNGER STRIKERS CONTINUE THEIR 3-WEEK-OLD PROTEST DESPITE THE FACT THAT THEY ARE UNDER DETENTION IN SEVERAL PLACES IN THE LIMA AREA (REF B). SEVERAL HAVE BEEN OBLIGED BY POLICE MEDICAL AUTHORITIES TO RECEIVE SERUM. DR. CALLER SAID THAT THE PROTESTORS AND SOME OF THE PRIESTS THAT HAD HARBORED THEM IN THEIR CHURCHES WERE THREATENED AND PHYSICALLY MISTREATED BY THE POLICE WHEN THEY WERE ARRESTED FOR VIOLATION OF PERU'S SANITARY CODE. ACCORDING TO CALLER, GOP AUTHORITIES DO NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH STRIKERS, WHO ARE KEPT IN STRICT ISOLATION FROM FAMILIES AND THE INDEPENDENT PRESS. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THEY WILL BE EVACUATED TO THE JUNGLE PENAL COLONY AT EL SEPA.

2. DESPITE ARCHBISHOP'S PROHIBITION ON USING CHURCHES AS

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PAGE 02 LIMA 01610 221902Z

LOCALE FOR POLITICAL PROTESTS (REF B), ACCORDING TO CALLER A GROUP OF FIRED WORKERS AS WELL AS STUDENTS FROM THE NATIONAL TEACHER TRAINING SCHOOL AT LA CANTUTA (CLOSED BY THE GOP OVER A YEAR AGO) HAVE BEGUN A NEW HUNGER STRIKE AT THE LA RECOLETA CONVENT. IN ADDITION, ON FEB 20 A GROUP OF 7 OR 8 ADULTS AND CHILDREN "TOOK" THE BRITISH EMBASSY IN LIMA FOR ABOUT A HALF HOUR. WE HAVE HEARD CONFLICTING REPORTS ON THE DENOUMENT OF THIS

PROTEST, WHICH COINCIDED EXACTLY WITH THE WASHINGTON DAY CEREMONIES IN THE SQUARE ON WHICH THE BRITISH CHANCERY IS LOCATED. UK EMBASSY OFFICER TOLD US THAT, WITH ASSISTANCE FROM THE POLICE, THEY PEACEFULLY PERSUADED THE PROTESTORS TO LEAVE THE CHANCERY AND TO THEIR KNOWLEDGE THEY WERE NOT ARRESTED. ANOTHER SOURCE SAYS THAT THEY WERE HAULED AWAY IN A POLICE VAN.

3. CALLER SEVERELY CENSURED THE TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES FOR THEIR SILENCE ON THE HUNGER STRIKE AND THE MASS FIRING OF WORKERS IN JULY 1977 WHICH HAS RESULTED IN THE CURRENT PROTEST. SHE SUPPORTED THE STRIKERS' CLAIMS THAT SHEER DESPERATION HAS DRIVEN THEM TO THIS EXTREME AND THAT THEIR OBJECTIVES ARE PERSONAL AND ECONOMIC, AS OPPOSED TO POLITICAL. DESPITE DECISIVE GOP ACTION TO NIP THIS PROTEST IN THE BUD, AND THE STIFF-LIPPED SILENCE OF THE GOP-CONTROLLED MEDIA, THE PROBLEM OF THE HUNGER STRIKERS REFUSES TO "GO AWAY." THE CENSORSHIP OF THE STRIKE THUS FAR HAS ONLY SERVED TO ADD FUEL TO THE LIMA RUMOR MILL, AND UNDOUBTEDLY SOME OF THE "BOLAS" NOW CIRCULATING ARE EXAGGERATED. DR. CALLER HAS A LONG HISTORY OF INVOLVEMENT IN LABOR AND PEASANT CAUSES AND THEREFORE CANNOT BE CONSIDERED AN ENTIRELY IMPARTIAL SOURCE. OUR PAST EXPERIENCE HAS TENDED TO CONFIRM, HOWEVER, INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM HER.

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